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THE

PRESENT PRACTICE

OF

MIDWIFERY

CONSIDERED.

QUIS FUROR ISTE NOVUS? VIRG.

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THE

Preſent Practice of Midwifery

CONSIDERED.

INTRODUCTION.

"WERE we lions painters!" is the conſtant outcry of all who think themſelves injured by either writers or painters, and who want abilities or opportunity to make repriſals in kind. The female part of our ſpecies are very loud in this outcry, and complain that the men, who are generally the writers, do them much injuſtice, and repreſent them unfairly. I allow that this may ſometimes be the caſe; but in one inſtance I believe I may venture to affirm, that men think and

ſpeak full as well of them as they deſerve; I mean, in that of their modeſty and delicacy. Theſe are qualities which the men *are* not, or *ought* not to be ſtrangers to, in their own feelings and manners; yet they are what we expect to find in women, in a much higher degree; even to ſuch a degree as to characterize the ſex by them; for the ideas of women, and thoſe of modeſty and delicacy, are ſo cloſely connected in our minds, that we do not willingly think of ſeparating them. Theſe are qualities which men are certainy fond of wherever they find women poſſeſſed of them, and, unleſs they have ſome ſelfiſh and baſe purpoſe in view, they are diſappointed when they find them not. On account of theſe qualities women are prized and eſteemed, and when they are loſt or thrown aſide, that eſteem is of courſe forfeited.

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This ſeems to me to account, in a ſimple and natural manner, for that diſreſpect which women, in the preſent age, experience from thoſe who are uſed to behave towards them in ſo very different a manner. The charm is broke, and they can no longer lead men captives at their will. Nature in them is ſtill the ſame, and would ſtill preſerve to them the ſame amiable diſpoſition of mind, and of courſe the ſame power and influence; but their feelings and ſentiments are ſo altered by education, example, and habit, that thoſe principles and ſenſations which were formerly cultivated and cheriſhed with ſo much care, are either much neglected, or perhaps in a great meaſure effaced, and the woman who ſhows that ſhe is ſtill under their influence, is induſtriouſly ſet up as an object of ridicule: For modeſty and delicacy being the great guards of female chaſtity (greater than even reaſon

itſelf, which we often ſee makes but a feeble reſiſtence when they are previouſly got the better of) it is no wonder that all men who conſider them as bars to their pleaſures, and all women who look upon them as a reproach to their own conduct, are at pains to eradicate, or to laugh them down, wherever they find them.

With what ſucceſs theſe efforts have been made, needs not here be told. The loſs of theſe qualities, and the conſequent forwardneſs, effrontery, and even profligacy of the ſex, are publickly marked, loudly ſpoken againſt, and are the topics of every converſation, and the ſubject of every newſpaper, or even of more authentick regiſters of publick tranſactions. — What pity it is, ſuch things ſhould be ſaid and wrote! But how much greater is the pity, that they cannot with truth be contradicted!

What

What cauſes can we aſſign for ſo total a neglect of that particular ornament of female nature, which renders it ſo lovely in the eyes of the other ſex, and without which it becomes an object of contempt to all men, and of abhorrence to many? Several have been aſſigned by different people; but none of them ſeem to have had a greater ſhare in it, than the faſhion which had been introduced among women of employing men about their perſons, in place of thoſe of their own ſex; which though it is by no means to be conſidered as the only cauſe, yet appears to me to have a much greater influence upon our manners, than many people care to allow.

It is not difficult to ſay how ſuch a faſhion came to be introduced. There are in women, as well as in men, implanted by nature, ſtrong deſires and appetites, which lead them to covet and wiſh for a con-

nexion with the other ſex. The unlimited indulgence of ſuch appetites is prevented by the principle of modeſty, which is either innate, or ſtrongly inculcated upon the mind from earlieſt infancy; and this principle is encouraged and ſupported, not only by the precepts of religion and morality, but by the ſanction of cuſtom, and the opinion of mankind in all ages. This produced a reſtraint which may have been always painful to many women, but which the whole ſex never avowed ſo ſtrong an inclination to throw off, as they have done in this and ſome neighbouring kingdoms, in modern times. They have not indeed profeſſedly indulged themſelves in the full gratification of their natural deſires, but they have taken ſuch ſteps as may ſatisfy them, in ſome meaſure, for the preſent, and procure to them a more ample gratification, whenever they are diſpoſed to indulge themſelves in it.

It is with this view that they have removed thoſe of their own ſex from their ſeveral employments about their perſons, and have eſtabliſhed men in their room. I am aware that many other pretences are alledged for this new and hitherto unheard of ſtep; but I muſt beg leave to ſay, that they are but meer pretences, and by no means the true reaſons for ſuch ſtrange conduct; and that it is the ſex alone which recommends men to theſe new employments, and procures a preference of the male to the female hair dreſſer or ſtay-maker, of the *valet* to the *fille de chambre*, and of the *accoucheur* to the midwife *.

* I am confident I do the women no injuſtice when I talk at this rate, and argue in this manner. I judge by what I think an unerring rule, even that of my own unſophiſticated feelings, which lead me to be ſo much fonder of a female than of a male aſſiſtant, in all the little neceſſary offices about my perſon, that, with my good will, I never would allow a man

The women of France are ſaid to have taken the lead in this matter, and to have been the firſt who broke through that reſtraint which the opinion of ages had laid the ſex under. Naturally eaſy, lively and unembarraſſed, they are ever foremoſt in what are called taſte and politeneſs, and, their *ſine quâ non*, *freedom*. They were the firſt who baniſhed their own ſex from their employments about their perſons, and ſubſtituted men in their places,

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man to enter the room where I lie, or where I dreſs; nor do I pretend to aſſign, as a reaſon for this, that my handmaid is more adroit, or does things better than my man-ſervant; but I am certainly better pleaſed with every thing ſhe does, I fancy it better done, and I feel more at my eaſe, and much more comfortable to myſelf, while ſhe is employed about me. — In ſhort, it is the *ſex* I ſee and feel, and that ſees and touches and aſſiſts me, in all our little intercourſe on theſe occaſions. Now I only beg leave to ſuppoſe that women feel as I do; and if they throw aſide their reſerve in other inſtances, why may they not in this alſo, and confeſs that theſe feelings are the true motives for the preference given to men in the different employments and offices juſt mentioned?

places, whether in the form of tradeſmen, or domeſtic ſervants; the latter of whom they not only employ to attend at their table, in their drawing rooms, and at their toilette, but (if fame ſays true) in their bed chambers alſo; though I am ſtill aukward enough to think ſhe muſt have been a bold woman, and "a wo-"man of ſpirit indeed," who firſt em-ployed a man to warm her ſhift, and throw it over her head, while ſhe ſat naked in bed to receive it.

However this may be, when the cuſ-tom of employing men in place of wo-men was once introduced, the medical faculty, or ſome branches of it at leaſt, were not ſo blind to their own intereſt, as to let ſlip the opportunity of rendering themſelves equally, or more neceſſary to the female world, than any other ſet of men whatever. They eaſily perſuaded them

them (for they love to be perſuaded) that they had hitherto been very unſafe in the hands of a ſet of ignorant midwives, and had run the greateſt riſk of loſing their lives every time they had employed them. In conſequence of their inſinuations and this perſuaſion, the midwives were diſmiſſed; and thoſe lively, eaſy dames, who before had given up every part of their body, but *one*, to different male aſſiſtants, did now reſign *that* alſo into the hands of male practitioners in midwifery, who being thereby rendered maſters of their perſons, became of courſe maſters of their hearts alſo; for as the poet ſays, "that "road leads directly to the heart." Modeſty and delicacy had been much ſhocked previous to this laſt ſtep, but the introduction of men to the practice of midwifery completed the ruin of theſe qualities. Nor need we wonder at it — When the huſband's right has been invaded,

vaded, in any one inſtance, and almoſt under any pretence whatever, the barrier is broke down, and one man ſucceeds another, and another after that, without limitation of number, or diſtinction of quality; and by this gradual progreſſion, all anxiety and remorſe in the minds of women are prevented or quieted: the firſt who makes the intruſion alledges utility and a regard for their ſafety as his pretence, and thoſe who are admitted to future freedoms urge the much more powerful plea of pleaſing and being pleaſed, of being happy themſelves and rendering them ſo likewiſe.

This indulgence of the natural appetites, authoriſed by cuſtom and example, is therefore, in my opinion, the *true* reaſon of the change that appears in the ideas and behaviour of our women, and alſo of the alteration that has happened in the practice of midwifery, though by no means

means the *avowed* one, at leaſt not commonly ſo; for though ſome women are above denying that they really love to have men about them better than women, yet in general, the pretence is *ſafety* in the ſuperiour ſkill and abilities of the male, when compared with the female practitioner. This is that plea of neceſſity, which they find as uſeful and effectual to ſcreen them from the cenſures of the men, as cuſtom and faſhion are to ſet them above the reflections of thoſe few of their own ſex, who ſtill venture to diſapprove of what they do. If this pretence were true, much might be ſaid in defence of the practice, for who would withhold the leaſt aſſiſtance that can be given in caſes of ſuch real diſtreſs? God forbid that any inſinuation or opinion of mine ſhould deprive that tender part of our ſpecies of any aid that can be afforded them; and if it be true that they are ſafer

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in the hands of men than of their own ſex, let our ideas of modeſty and delicacy be laid aſide and forgot, or let them be reconciled to the preſent mode, and after all that happens on theſe occaſions, let huſbands hug their wives to their boſoms as perfectly pure and unpolluted. But I am, in my own mind, throughly perſuaded, that the pretence is an impoſition, and abſolutely falſe; and that women, as they are more proper in the eye of modeſty, ſo they are equally capable with the men, to afford every help that may be needful, in almoſt every caſe where a midwife is wanted. On this ground it is that I preſume to find fault with the preſent practice, and unleſs I can ſupport what I now advance, I give up the point, and leave every woman in the kingdom to do whatever ſhe pleaſes with her man-midwife, without fear of cenſure.

It may be of uſe towards clearing up this point, and coming at the truth of the matter, to trace the hiſtory of the art, and enquire whether men or women were originally employed in it, or when the former were firſt introduced; and then to enquire into the nature of the improvements made, or pretended to be made in it by the men, and to examine all their boaſted ſuperiour advantages, on account of which they are ſuppoſed to be ſo much ſafer than women.

SECTION

SECTION I.

IN the firſt ages of the world, we may ſuppoſe that the natural dictates of modeſty were liſtened to, and that no man was allowed to approach the apartments or preſence of a woman, in ſuch delicate circumſtances as thoſe of child-bed; and accordingly, the moſt ancient hiſtories we have ſpeak of women only as being employed in this office. Moſes, who is the oldeſt hiſtorian we know, ſpeaks of female midwives only; and from his ſilence we may ſuppoſe, that men midwives had never been heard of among the Egyptians, otherwiſe they would certainly have been called upon in the critical circumſtance mentioned by that authour, when tools of government, and ſuch perſons as would form their opinion and practice according

to the directions of a tyrannical king, or his wicked counſellors, were wanted. Whether it was an unhappy circumſtance for the whole race of Iſrael (whoſe deſtruction and extirpation was aimed at) that men were not the midwives, I do not take upon me to ſay; but, from what we are told, they had no reaſon to complain of the hands they were in, or to think themſelves *unſafe* becauſe they had no other to whom they might apply. — The humanity, ability, and addreſs exhibited, on this occaſion, by the Egyptian midwives, ought to have procured better quarter for the whole ſiſterhood, than it has of late been the cuſtom, with ſome writers, to allow them. As Egypt was then, and for many ages after, a ſeminary of cunning men, and a ſchool for rare inventions, we may venture to take it for granted, that if we find no account of men-midwives in that country, we are

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not likely to hear of their being employed any where elſe. Nor do we, in the earlieſt accounts given of the manners and cuſtoms of other nations, find any ſuch denomination, or the moſt diſtant hint of ſuch a cuſtom *. We are not however to attribute this to the entire ſilence of hiſtorians upon this ſubject, for among them, we have frequent mention made of women, not only as practitioners in midwifery, but as writers alſo upon that ſubject. Ætius, who wrote ſo fully upon it, profeſſedly borrows what he advances from Aſpaſia, who, if ſhe did not prac-

* Thoſe who have attended to, and are acquainted with, the condition of women in eaſtern countries, where the ſuſpicions of the men with regard to their chaſtity always were, and ſtill continue to be, remarkably ſtrong, and where every method is taken to prevent the breach of it, will not wonder that no ſuch character as that of a man-midwife ever appeared among them: indeed it would have been ſuch a ſoleciſm in their political œconomy as could not have been accounted for.

tice as a midwife, had been perfectly ſkilled in the duties of that office. Cleopatra is alſo mentioned as a writer on midwifery, with marks of approbation and eſteem; and ſome grave authors ſuppoſe her to have been the ſame with the famous Egyptian queen of that name. — 'Tis pity that the faſhion of employing men-midwives had not been introduced in her days, as ſhe was ſo well qualified to have given them full and excellent inſtructions, for every part of their conduct towards women who wanted their aſſiſtance.

I do not recollect that any mention is made of men-midwives by either the Greek or the Roman writers, but on the contrary, I find them making frequent mention of women as employed in that office. Indeed if we appeal to writers of all denominations among them, and particularly to their comic authors, who

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are the beſt and trueſt hiſtorians of the manners of the age they live in, we ſhall find that they had ſo little notion of any thing that was not female being concerned in what related to the bringing of children, that all the deities they addreſſed, and whoſe aſſiſtance they implored on that occaſion, were of the female claſs; and tho' there were male deities who preſided over the art of phyſic in general, yet no woman ever thought of invoking their aid in her labour-pains. Theſe ſame writers do often introduce female midwives among their *perſonæ dramatis*, and ſpeak of them as the proper depoſitaries of thoſe myſteries which men were not allowed to pry into. I am perſuaded, that if ſuch a ſtrange character as that of a man-midwife had ever been aſſumed by any of the medical faculty, in thoſe days, their dramatic writers, who were certainly no reſpecters of perſons, would not have failed to have

expoſed it to public view, in the truly ridiculous light in which it ought to appear. They had not the ſame diſcouragements to deter them from introducing a character of that kind upon the ſtage, which *ought*, and no doubt, *do* intimidate the poets of our days. The Grecian and Roman women had not the ſame influence on the public deciſions, with regard to literary merit, nor the ſame power to promote or diſcourage a writer, as ours have at preſent, and what powers they had, they appear to have exerted in ſupport of their own ſex, upon every occaſion; and they would certainly have applauded, inſtead of hiſſing, an author, who had expoſed to ridicule an innovator in a profeſſion which ſeemed ſo immediately to belong to them: whereas, in our days, were a character of that ſort to be attempted by the firſt comic genius of the age, and ſupported on the ſtage by the greateſt powers of action,

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it could never make its way, or withſtand the oppoſition that would be raiſed againſt it by almoſt every woman, of every ſtation and condition in the kingdom.

The abſolute ſilence of the comic writers on this ſubject inclines me to ſuſpect the authenticity of an anecdote, relating to the Athenians, which is alledged as an exception to what is here advanced, about the univerſal practice and conſent of antiquity in favour of women midwives. Theſe people are reported to have, upon ſome occaſion or other, made one of thoſe ſhort-ſighted laws (which has only one point in view, without guarding againſt the inconveniencies it may produce) whereby they forbid women to interfere in the practice of phyſic in which they included the practice of midwifery. A ſet of would-be men-midwives in Athens took advantage of this, and wanted to obtrude themſelves upon the child-bearing women,

under the pretence of aſſiſting them in their labour. But the Athenian matrons abſolutely refuſed to ſubmit to the impoſition, and *proteſted* that they would run every riſk, to which a woman in labour might be expoſed without any aſſiſtant at all, rather than let a man come near them on ſuch occaſions. They, in a clandeſtine manner, employed ſome of their own ſex; who were thereupon proſecuted by the diſappointed and enraged male practitioners, and were likely to be condemned; when theſe chaſte and modeſt matrons crowded into court, and pleaded the cauſe of the midwives of their choice, crying ſhame upon the judges, who were attempting to corrupt and debauch their own wives and daughters, in place of acting the more becoming part of protectors of their virtue and good fame. By theſe and ſuch like arguments the legiſlators were convinced of their error, and

the impropriety of their own law — they repealed it, and allowed women to practice as before. Suppoſing this matter to have happened juſt as it is handed down to us by grave antiquarians, I know not that the men-widwives would gain much to their cauſe by reporting it; but in reality it depends upon the credit of an author, who lived many hundred years after the thing is ſuppoſed to have taken place, and who rather publiſhes it as a moral tale, to point out to women what ought to be their behaviour if they ſhould ever be under ſuch difficulties, than as a real hiſtorical fact. However, allowing it to be true, the conduct of the Athenian women (ſo very different from what we ſhould expect at this time of day) will raiſe different reflections and conjectures in the minds of different people, according to their ſeveral diſpoſitions. Some, with a ſneer, will conclude the fact to

have been of a very old date indeed, and when Athens was but very little changed from its original ſtate of ſimplicity. Others may alledge, that the true reaſon why the women refuſed to admit the men as midwives was, that they were impoſed and obtruded upon them by their huſbands, and that if they had been left at liberty, and to their own free choice, they might perhaps have been as fond of them as others have been ſince. But it ſeems, after all, more candid, and more like the truth, to ſuppoſe that theſe virtuous women were actuated not only by a principle of modeſty, but by much prudence and diſcretion, which ſuggeſted to them, that they were more likely to gain and preſerve the eſteem of the men by retaining their delicacy, than if they had given it up, even in obedience to an expreſs law, which, by the by, was ſo abſurd, that they might almoſt ſuppoſe it made for

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no other reaſon but to try how they would reliſh it, and that no one could in earneſt expect their compliance with it.

But to return to the hiſtory of our art. As no ſuch thing as a man-midwife had been countenanced by the Greeks or Romans, either in their ſtate of uncultivated rudeneſs, or in that of taſte and refinement, it is not very likely that the character ſhould be found among the plain, ſimple and unbiaſſed nations of the north, who ſucceeded them in the government of many parts of the world; their ideas and manners were ſuch as nature dictated, and they were ſtrangers to this, as they were to every other refinement of luxury or luſt. Nor, among all the hiſtorians who write of theſe people, do we meet with the leaſt hint or ſurmiſe, that ſuch a thing was once thought of among them; and I believe every one will readily agree with me in opinion, that if any of theſe rugged

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ſons of war had found a man with his wife, attempting to act the part of a man-midwife, he would ſoon have taught him what reſpect was due to female modeſty, or at leaſt to a woman who is the property of another man.

If we proceed to examine the hiſtory of phyſic after the decline of the Roman empire, we ſhall find every thing relating to this profeſſion in the ſame ſituation as it had been among the ancients; nor, for many hundred years after that period, do we meet with the name of any man who was ſuppoſed to act as a man-midwife, except one, and he was by birth an Arabian: the native of a country, where the warmth of climate has been alledged as an excuſe for other inſtances, beſides this, of the readineſs ſhown by women to admit, and even court the familiarity of the men.

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I cannot pretend to ſay exactly how long man-midwifery has become a diſtinct profeſſion, or ſince men have been ſubſtituted in the place of women upon every common occaſion. I believe I may venture to confine it to the preſent century; for though there were many writers on the ſubject before that time, and the men artiſts were endeavouring to wriggle themſelves into eſteem and credit among the women, previous to that period, yet their advances were at firſt but ſlow, nor could their patients be prevailed on, all at once, to give up and forget the genuine and ſtrong impreſſions of nature; and accordingly we find many books, in the laſt, and even in this century, tranſlated from Latin, or perhaps ſome modern tongues, into the vernacular language of different countries, profeſſedly for the uſe of women, who were the only acknowledged midwives.

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In order to compleat this hiſtorical view of the art, it is neceſſary that the preſent ſtate of it ſhould be next examined, that it may appear how much it is altered from what it was, and continued to be from the beginning of the world till within theſe very few years. But before I ſay any thing upon that head, it may be proper to obviate an objection, which may naturally occur to moſt people who think on, and attend to the ſubject; and it is an objection upon which the men-midwives lay no ſmall ſtreſs. In former ages, ſay they, as well as the preſent, women were liable to *præternatural labours*, wherein the children could not be brought into the world by the efforts of nature only, or without the help of art: now this art being only known to the men, or they only being fit to put it in practice, there muſt, of courſe, have been men-midwives in all ages of the world.

To this objection I anſwer, that as far back as the hiſtory of phyſic goes, we no doubt have accounts of ſurgeons, or (what amounted to the ſame thing) phyſicians who practiſed ſurgery; and I readily allow that, though very ſeldom, yet there might ſometimes be occaſion to call for their aſſiſtance, when nature was not equal to the taſk of bringing away a child entire, and it became neceſſary to divide and bring it away piece-meal. This was allowed to be, and conſidered as the ſurgeon's buſineſs; and accordingly we find in Hippocrates, and other ſucceeding writers, many directions given for opening the head, and for ſeparating that, and the different limbs, from the bodies of children, in the mother's womb, that they might be brought away in that ſtate, when ſhe could not otherwiſe be delivered of them. Theſe directions, I ſay, were addreſſed to the phyſician or ſurgeon, while any other

direction that was thought worth mentioning was addreſſed to the men-midwives, who were ſuppoſed to be conſtantly employed on all common occaſions. Such an operation as this I conſider in the ſame light that I do any other operation in ſurgery; and I judge of the woman who applies to a man for this purpoſe, as if ſhe were under the unhappy neceſſity of conſulting him for any other diſorder, that affected the ſame parts of her body, and rendered an operation neceſſary; and where every thing that is done for her relief, being the conſequence of inevitable neceſſity, muſt ſtand fully juſtified in the ſtricteſt eye of modeſty and decorum. Of this there may perhaps be occaſion to ſay ſomewhat more, when the uſe of inſtruments comes to be conſidered: in the mean time let me add, that if our men-midwives will confine themſelves to this part of the practice, ſo far from incurring cenſure, they ſhall,

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with my conſent, be entitled to every kind of encouragement and approbation, from every man as well as every woman in the kingdom. But they know better things: they are aware that, on theſe terms, they would very ſeldom be called upon, and that *laudantur et algent* might ſoon be applied to them as well as to the poets: and therefore they have, with much induſtry, and by a thouſand arts, got their trade put upon another footing; which ſituation of it I am now to conſider, and in doing ſo, to give an account of the preſent ſtate of the practice of midwifery.

It has been already obſerved, that, till within theſe hundred years, a man-midwife was never thought of but in caſes of extreme danger; and even ſo lately as the beginning of the preſent century, it was by no means an uſual thing to employ them in common caſes; or if they were ſo employed, it was looked upon as ſome-

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thing extraordinary, fit only to be talked of in whiſpers, and ſhe who employed them was conſidered as a woman of ſpirit, and not very ſqueamiſh. But, ſince that period, it is amazing to think what a progreſs the *faſhion* of employing men-midwives has made: our women, of all ranks and degrees, are of one mind in that reſpect, and ſhe would be looked upon in a very mean, or a very ridiculous light, who ſhould employ a woman midwife, under the pretence of having the leaſt ſcruple or objection to a man in that capacity. Whatever pretences they may ſtill make, in words, about the danger there is in employing the one, and the ſafety there is in the other, yet their actions and conduct do by no means correſpond with ſuch pretences; for we find almoſt every young woman in this kingdom, from the very firſt, (that is, as ſoon as ſhe is married, or even before that event)

and

and before ſhe thinks any thing about danger, or of being in want of any extraordinary aſſiſtance, reſolving to employ a man as her midwife.

In conſequence of this *faſhion*, the practitioners of that art are multiplied to an incredible number; and not only in every large, and in every ſmall town, but in every village in the kingdom, you may meet with one of thoſe members of the medical faculty, who is ſkilled in every thing, and in every thing equally well; who acts in the ſeveral capacities of doctor, ſurgeon, apothecary, tooth-drawer, and man-midwife; ſo that whether you want a tooth or a child plucked out, this dexterous artiſt is equally expert at both; and indeed he generally does both in the ſame manner, or rather by the ſame means, the ſtrength, viz. of his wonder-working arm, and the grinding or tearing force of his inſtruments.

But to examine the characters of theſe ſubſtitutes to our female midwives a little more attentively, and the opportunities they have for acquiring that ſuperior knowledge, on account of which they are preferred to them. Their education is generally in the ſhop of an apothecary, to whom they are bound apprentices while almoſt children; here they uſually ſpend five or ſix years, learning to put medicines together, or perhaps to ſpread a plaiſter, and apply it to a ſore leg. Theſe accompliſhments are deemed ſufficient by ſome of them, who, ſeeking no further, commence practitioners themſelves, as ſoon as they recover their indentures. But others, and perhaps the greater number, by way of completing their education, and putting it out of the power of malice to queſtion their abilities, equip themſelves for London, where, with all poſſible expedition, (for their time is generally much limited)

they are, as they term it, to walk an hoſpital — perhaps to walk from hoſpital to hoſpital; to attend lectures on anatomy, on ſurgery, and on midwifery; they are to perform operations upon dead bodies (if they can afford to purchaſe them;) and in ſhort, they are to acquire all the inſtruction which that large, and conſequently learned city can ſupply them with. Such then is the education even of the beſt of them, and ſuch their opportunities for improvements; and what they amount to I leave to be determined by thoſe who know the manner in which a young man of eighteen or twenty years of age, juſt turned looſe into the world, generally ſpends his time when he firſt gets to London. Thus accompliſhed however, and at a time of life when diſcretion has not yet begun to influence their behaviour, and to reſtrain, and keep within due bounds, thoſe naturally unruly appetites,

which are apt to hurry them headlong into the groſſeſt and moſt criminal attempts, and which their London education has only taught them how to gratify with more art and addreſs! I ſay, thus accompliſhed, they take their ſtations in the different parts of the country, where they intend to exerciſe their trade; and where, if we were to ſuppoſe the inhabitants directed in their actions by common ſenſe and common decency, we ſhould expect that the men would not, for ſome time at leaſt, be over fond of entruſting either their lives or limbs to their care, and that the women would keep them at the ſame diſtance, and behave towards them with the ſame reſerve, that they would towards any other young man. But in place of this, (what would hardly be credited, did not daily experience prove the truth) no ſooner have theſe faſhionable midwives ſet up their ſign boards, covered with

great

great letters, (like hieroglyphics emblematical of their qualifications) than they are employed by every one round them, and are conſidered as fit to be admitted to every kind of familiarity, with every woman in the town or country where they live, and in every ſtation of life; and the younger they are, the fonder do our chaſte dames ſeem to be of employing them. There ſeems to be a ſpecies of downright rage and madneſs in this unaccountable conduct, ſufficient to fill any ſober thinking man with the utmoſt aſtoniſhment, and to tempt him to believe, that a *furor uterinus*, in the moſt literal ſenſe, has ſeiſed almoſt every woman in the kingdom. At leaſt, there needs no ſtronger proof, that fear of danger and a deſire of being in ſafer hands, are by no means the *real* cauſe why ſuch boys are perferred by them to midwives of their own ſex, as it is hardly poſſible for any

woman to be more compleatly ignorant than many of them are.

I am told that ſome of the obſterical faculty, who figure away in London, and ſome other large towns, and who chooſe to be diſtinguiſhed by the name of *ſurgeon-midwives*, aſſume to themſelves great conſequence and dignity; they deſpiſe thoſe country practitioners, whom they repudiate under the denomination of *apothecary-midwives*, and rank them no higher than they do the common run of what they call *dram-drinking old beldames*, who have peſtered the world, under the name of midwives, for theſe five thouſand years, and who have, over and over, deſtroyed every child and every woman in it. —— Let theſe men of high and of low degree ſettle the point of precedency their own way. I ſpeak of men in general who aſſume the character and act the part of midwives, and I write againſt the practice, without enter-

entering into the particular and diſtinguiſhing characters of the profeſſors; to far the greateſt part of whom (be their denomination what it will) the moſt material part of the deſcription given above, may with ſtrict juſtice be applied.

This wonderful change in their favour the men-midwives are well aware of, and ready to acknowledge. They boaſt of, and aſſume no little credit to themſelves upon it; they conſider it as an improvement in the manners and cuſtoms of the preſent age, and they account for it in the following manner. "The progreſs of mid-
"wifery, ſay they, and the improvements
"which the men are capable of making
"in it, were, for many ages, obſtructed
"by the *falſe modeſty* of the women; but
"the introduction of *polite literature*, by
"degrees, got the better of this falſe mo-
"deſty, and of courſe paved the way for the
"quicker progreſs of this art, in the hands

" of male practitioners *." By *polite literature*, we commonly understand a knowledge of philology and philosophy, or an acquaintance with languages, arts, and sciences; but that can hardly be the meaning intended by these writers, as it is not true that, in that sense of the phrase, it has had any tendency to promote the progress

* These are pretty nearly the words of a grave, and a very useful writer on midwifery; I mean Dr. Smellie, to whom I take this opportunity of acknowledging my obligations, for many articles of information referred to in these pages. I know it is become a fashion to decry and hold him cheap, and to talk of his ignorance in matters of learning, &c. But this is nothing to the present purpose, nor ought it to invalidate the authority of any quotation made from him. I knew him well—He was an honest man, and not only a faithful compiler of the doctrines and sentiments of other writers on the subject, but whatever he advanced as new, and properly his own, was founded on real facts and observation: and, what ought still more to recommend him, and enforce his authority with those of his fraternity, he was an enthusiast in his profession; man-midwifery was the idol of his heart; and he believed in his forceps as firmly as he did in his bible.

greſs of their art. In Greece and in Rome, polite learning flouriſhed and roſe to as great an height as it has ever done ſince, and yet a Grecian or a Roman matron, even in the æra of their greateſt politeneſs, would have bluſhed, tho' alone, at the very idea of doing with a man-midwife what is every day practiſed by our women, even of the very beſt character. And if we examine the hiſtory of our own country, or that of France, we ſhall find, that the learned embelliſhments of the mind were carried to a much greater height among the women, long before men-midwives came into faſhion, than they have ever been ſince. In the ſenſe of theſe authors therefore, polite literature muſt be ſomething different, and we muſt endeavour to gueſs at its meaning by the effect ſaid to be produced by it: "It is ſomething "that has got the better of the *falſe modeſty* "of the women." But here we might be at a loſs again, and unable perhaps readily to under-

underſtand the meaning of *falſe modeſty*; but luckily for us, that matter is explained in the poſition laid down above: "Falſe modeſty is what obſtructed the "advances and progreſs of the men-mid-"wives with the women:" And polite literature is what puſhed this falſe modeſty aſide, and opened them a free paſſage! So that, without troubling myſelf with any further criticiſm upon, or inveſtigation of the ſubject, I may venture to inform and aſſure my fair readers, if any ſuch honour me with their attention, that they have no occaſion either for books or the converſation of wiſe men, and need only inform themſelves how they may moſt readily, and with the beſt grace, admit the men to take whatever liberties, and uſe them with whatever familiarity they pleaſe, in order to be deemed truly and politely learned, in the opinion of their men-midwives. This is the learn-

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ing moſt for their purpoſe, and what the moſt eſteem in every woman they are employed by; it is what they beſt underſtand; and in which the moſt ignorant of them can hardly be puzzled *.

Thus much it may ſuffice to have ſaid of the hiſtory of the art; from which it plainly appears, that the preſent mode of

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* Leſt any one ſhould ſuppoſe that I have not explained this matter clearly and candidly, and ſhould charge me with quibbling and ſputtering, and raiſing a duſt, that I may eſcape in the cloud from a matter that I do not underſtand, I will, if he pleaſes, tell him frankly what I take to be the meaning of *polite literature* in the ſenſe it is uſed by writers on midwifery. I apprehend it implies a perfect acquaintance with what are called the arts of civiziled and poliſhed life; whatever promotes eaſe and pleaſure, and removes every ſcruple and obſtacle that ſtands in the way of either; whatever ſerves to adorn the perſon, and provoke the ſenſe; whatever melts down and renders the mind more ſuſceptible of ſoft and tender impreſſions; and, in ſhort, whatever is ſubſervient to the purpoſes of luxury of every kind, and tends to forward the gratification of every ſenſual appetite.

of employing men in place of women midwives has no ſanction or countenance from antiquity, nor was ever attempted, or at leaſt admitted, in any age, till the century we now live in, or a very few years before its commencement. It is nevertheleſs ſufficiently evident, that the world has ſubſiſted, and women brought forth children to people and inhabit it, though they had nobody to aſſiſt them in their labours but thoſe of their own ſex, and notwithſtanding the danger they are now repreſented to have been in every time they employed them. But this it ſeems is not ſufficient; we are told that great improvements have been made, and the obſtetric art is now practiſed with ſo much more ſafety to the patient by the men than it ever was by the women, that it would be downright madneſs and folly in any childbearing woman to truſt herſelf in the hands of the latter, when ſhe can meet with

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the former, far or near. In order to judge of the full force of this plea, it becomes now neceſſary to enquire into the nature of theſe improvements, and the ſuperior advantages of the men; to examine how far the art is rendered more ſecure and ſalutary by them; and from theſe enquiries to inform ourſelves whether women, in labour and during pregnancy, are really and truly ſafer in the hands of men-midwives than in thoſe of their own ſex. This is propoſed to be the ſubject of

SECTION

SECTION II.

BEFORE I come immediately to the buſineſs of this ſection, I would premiſe an obſervation or two.

1ſt. I would have it underſtood, that I do not mean to advance, or attempt to prove, that women are *more* capable than men of performing the office of a midwife. I only mean to ſay, that they are *equally* capable of affording all the aſſiſtance that is neceſſary. And if I prove them equally capable, I may perhaps be allowed to ſuppoſe, that the ſuperior propriety of employing them, in the eye of decency and modeſty, will procure them a preference.

2dly. I beg leave to ſay ſomething of the character and qualifications of the midwife whom I mean to recommend to this preference. If I am to judge by the writ-

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ings and converſation of ſome men-midwives, I muſt believe that the women in general of that profeſſion, are not only remarkably weak in their underſtanding, and groſsly ignorant, but that they are poſſeſſed of almoſt every bad quality beſides: I muſt deem them drunken; ſhockingly indecent both in their words and behaviour; ſlaves to prejudices and ſuperſtition; precipitate, rude, and often barbarous towards their patients; totally unacquainted with the proper management of them, and yet obſtinate, and averſe to the advice and inſtructions of thoſe whoſe profeſſion or abilities may enable them to direct what is proper. That ſome women may be found who deſerve this character I cannot deny, though I know them not; but theſe are not the midwives I mean to recommend. There always have been, and ſtill are to be found, women of a different ſtamp: women of good

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plain ſenſe and underſtanding, decent and ſober, who are capable of making obſervations themſelves, and of underſtanding what they read, and hear from others, to whoſe inſtructions and admonitions they are ready and willing to liſten. Such women as thoſe will gladly embrace all the means of information put in their power, and will endeavour to be acquainted with the practice of their art, ſo far as it is underſtood in the age and country wherein they live; they will learn and adopt whatever improvements are made in it, and ſhake off the prejudices and ſuperſtitious practices, which they may have imbibed from, and entertained in common with, thoſe who ought to have known better. Experience will teach ſuch a woman moſt of the practical parts of her profeſſion; but if I may ſuppoſe, for the preſent, that ſhe has alſo the ſame opportunities of inſtruction, in the more immediate buſineſs

ſineſs of midwifery, that men enjoy, ſhe will be qualified for the buſineſs of a midwife in the manner I would wiſh. Some women, qualified in this manner, we may find among the few who are ſtill employed in that art, if we chooſe to enquire after them; and I will endeavour to ſhew, by and by, that we might eaſily have many more, if they were to be encouraged and employed.

Such are the midwives whom I mean to recommend, and whom I propoſe to compare with men-midwives of the beſt characters and abilities. As for thoſe midwives whoſe deſcription I have borrowed from ſome writers on midwifery, and who are painted as a ſcandal to their ſex as well as profeſſion, I leave them to be compared with ſome of the men-midwives mentioned in the laſt ſection, who will (I'll venture to affirm) fully match them in ſelf-conceit, rudeneſs, ig-

norance, drunkenneſs, and indecency of a more dangerous nature than what the women can poſſibly be guilty of --- But railing is no part of my intention, nor do I make any compariſon between the worſt, but between the beſt of each ſex.

3dly. I deem it neceſſary to conſider what the real office of a midwife is; which, when defined or deſcribed, may ſerve as a ſtandard and teſt whereby we are to judge of the merit of each of the parties under conſideration. It is a known truth, and I believe never controverted, that the birth of all animals is the work of nature only. It is attended with labour and pain to every female creature; and in conſequence of that labour and pain, and the efforts produced by them, it rarely fails to be accompliſhed. This operation of nature is not inſtantaneous, but gradual; and its gradual progreſs has evidently a tendency to the preſervation

both

both of the mother and her offspring; and if any thing happens to haſten or hurry on that gradual progreſs, they are both obſerved to ſuffer by it. This doctrine is acknowledged, and laid down as abſolutely certain, by all writers in midwifery; who are very particular in their admonitions againſt meddling, or doing any thing at all, in natural labours, for fear of hurrying on, or diſturbing that progreſs and gradual advance towards delivery, which is, and ought to be the work of nature only. Upon this principle one might be led to conclude, that no aſſiſtance at all is neceſſary to women when in labour; and we are told, that thoſe who are called uncivilized nations, and who are ſuppoſed to live according to the dictates of nature only, are literally of that opinion; for among them, when a womon finds her labour pains coming on, ſhe retires to ſome place by herſelf, and

there ſhe continues till her child is born, which ſhe afterwards brings and preſents to her huſband. But though this cuſtom be ſpoke of in general terms, yet the truth ſeems to be, that theſe women only get by themſelves in this manner, when they are ſo circumſtanced that they can have none of their own ſex to attend them; for the common dictates of humanity would naturally ſuggeſt to every woman, who happened to be near, that though ſhe can take no part in the labour, can give no material aſſiſtance, or procure the ſmalleſt eaſe even in one pain, yet ſhe ought to attempt, by every means in her power, to comfort and encourage one of her own ſex under ſuch diſtreſſing circumſtances as thoſe of childbirth. Where ſocieties are formed, this becomes the more immediate office of neighbours, friends and relations, who endeavour to render every thing as comfortable to the

woman

woman in labour as her preſent ſituation will admit, and her condition in life afford, whether in diet, coverings, or other accommodations. They alſo, of courſe, receive and take care of the new-born child, which the mother's weak ſituation will not allow her to do herſelf, without pain and difficulty: and whatever other aſſiſtance a by-ſtander can give, they will naturally yield to both mother and child. Some women, who appear more judicious and dexterous than others upon ſuch occaſions, are oftener applied to than the reſt, not only by their immediate friends and neighbours, but perhaps by thoſe at ſome diſtance, who have formed an opinion of their utility in ſuch circumſtances. This ſeems to have given riſe to midwifery as a profeſſion; and this points out what the real buſineſs of a midwife is, namely, to take eare of every accommodation that may render the ſituation of

a woman in labour more comfortable, and to wait patiently with her till the child is, by the natural efforts of the mother, brought into the world, when ſhe is to receive the child, and to do what is neceſſary and proper for both. This, I ſay, is generally all a midwife's real buſineſs; and whatever ſhe does beſides only ſerves, in common caſes, to quiet the alarms and fears of the woman in labour, or to ſatisfy the impatience of thoſe about her. But ſhe ought carefully to guard againſt doing too much for this purpoſe; and as ſhe recommends patience to the perſon ſhe attends, ſhe ought to arm herſelf with it in like manner, and cultivate it as her chief and moſt valuable qualification. If ſhe does otherwiſe, and buſies herſelf too much, ſhe is almoſt certain of doing miſchief, and of provoking and hurrying on the labour pains faſter than they would advance naturally, and

of their own accord. Indeed a woman who knows that nothing more is expected from her than to wait and ſee her patient ſafe at laſt, is under little or no temptation to attempt a great deal, or to do any thing which ſhe knows ſhe ought not to do; and ſhe may commonly ſilence all complaints of inactivity and doing nothing to relieve the woman in pain, by poſitive aſſurances, that *all meddling does miſchief.*

As this is known, and univerſally allowed to be the true ſituation both of the patient and her midwife, in ninety-nine labours out of an hundred, one cannot help wondering what pretences could be uſed for ſuperſeding and diſcarding women, and introducing men-midwives into the lying-in chamber. 'Tis evident however that pretences have not been wanting, as they have certainly ſucceeded in getting themſelves employed upon all theſe common, as well as upon extraordinary oc-

caſions. I am not ſufficiently acquainted with all the artifices (or, if you pleaſe, the addreſs) of theſe obſtetric gentlemen, whereby they inſinuate themſelves into the good graces and employment of the breeding women; but, among others, I am told that the following method is one of the moſt common —— Advantage is taken of what is called a lingering labour, which has often the appearance of difficulty, danger, and much diſtreſs to the woman who continues in that painful or anxious ſituation, for many hours, or perhaps days. Upon ſuch occaſions, the man-midwife, or his emiſſaries, take pains to inſinuate, either in expreſs or oblique terms, that the labour might have been over, and the woman relieved from her miſery much ſooner, if a man had been employed, whoſe ſuperior ſkill and abilities enabled him to give relief in a much ſhorter time. This then is the pretence

upon

upon which he is introduced; and in ſuch circumſtances, what does it ſeem natural to expect from him? He is well aware that ſomething more is expected from him than from a common midwife. He cannot therefore content himſelf with recommending patience; nor dares he affirm, that *all meddling does miſchief*, for he knows that he is brought there in hopes that by *meddling* he will do a great deal of good. Something therefore muſt be attempted. If he is ignorant, he will certainly give a great deal of unneceſſary trouble to the woman whom he pretends to aſſiſt, or he may perhaps do her much real hurt and injury. But if he is ſkillful, he will put on the appearance of buſineſs, though he in reality does nothing; he will follow the precepts of the beſt maſters in the art, and do *ſomething to amuſe*; and with a great deal of parade, much buſtle, and affected concern, he

will

will *gain time*. In doing this he may be in the right; but then he is acting a mean and ſly, not to ſay a deceitful and diſhoneſt part; for he in reality does no more for the patient, than any honeſt and ſkilful midwife would do by acting openly and profeſſedly, without pretence, parade or artifice. Indeed theſe men do, in effect, acknowledge all this themſelves; for when they arrive at any conſiderable degree of eminence in their profeſſion, or have to do with women who have been always accuſtomed to men-midwives, and by whom they are in no danger of being diſplaced for not doing more than women are uſed to do; they are contented to lay aſide the farce, and to ſit down quietly and let nature do her own work; they recommend patience to the woman in labour, and either are or appear to be patient themſelves; they acknowledge that all meddling does miſchief; and that

they

they do no more, and ought to do no more than any well-informed midwife would do in their place; and, in ſhort, that they are as mere midwives as any in the kingdom.

Theſe are the different ſituations of men and women midwives in common and natural labours, whether of ſhorter or longer duration; and theſe are the expectations which are formed with regard to them, and the conſequent behaviour that may be looked for at the hands of each. This however the men do not allow, but, in contradiction to it, they alledge, that ſo far from doing miſchief by their officious meddling, they not only inculcate by precepts, but in their practice preſerve the utmoſt regard to ſimplicity, and obſervance of the operations of nature, which they would on no account interrupt; and that the women

men are the only buſy and meddling practitioners, affecting to do much, and through their ignorance of what it may be ſafe and proper to do, proving the cauſe of much miſchief. This charge againſt the women may perhaps be verified in ſome inſtances, now-a-days; but I believe I may venture to ſay, that it ſeldom happened before man-midwifery became a diſtinct profeſſion. Women had then nothing to ſtimulate or provoke them to deviate from the direct path in which they were uſed to walk, and which they found ſo ſafe and eaſy. But when they were broke in upon by a ſet of pretending intruders, who aſſumed great merit to themſelves for the aſſiſtance they gave to women in labour, and for their knowing how to *do ſomething* for them in the hours of pain and diſtreſs; and finding that thoſe who were uſed to employ them liſtened to thoſe pretences, they then

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alſo thought it neceſſary to make a parade of *doing ſomewhat*; and, not being ſufficiently inſtructed in the *art of amuſing*, ignorant women may very poſſibly, like ignorant men, ſometimes do much miſchief, or at leaſt give much trouble. But were they to be left again to the quiet poſſeſſion of an art which nature originally intended them for, they would ſoon lay aſide their officious meddling, and return to their duty of waiting, and allowing nature to do its own work.

I doubt much whether I ſhall be credited when I talk of ſo little aſſiſtance, and that ſo ſeldom wanted by women in labour, as ſuch an idea of the matter does by no means agree with the frequent accounts we hear of great danger, of many hair-breadth eſcapes, and of the wonderous works of men-midwives, by whoſe great attention and ſkill the life of the poor woman has been ſaved, which

muſt otherwiſe have been inevitably loſt. But that ſuch accounts as theſe do not prove my repreſentation of the matter to be falſe will eaſily appear, if we conſider to what they owe their riſe. I have obſerved, that in every lingering labour, the patient, and perhaps thoſe about her, fancy that there muſt be great danger. This apprehenſion is magnified by her male aſſiſtant, who catches at the opportunity to enhance his own conſequence, and who, beſides, during the courſe of his tedious attendance, probably does many things which had better be let alone, on purpoſe to blind every one preſent, and evince his own utility. In all this he is juſtified and helped out by the woman herſelf, who either believes that his aſſiſtance is of as much conſequence as he pretends, or, in order to juſtify her own conduct in employing him, is willing to make other people believe ſo. In this manner

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then our accounts of dangerous and difficult labours are raiſed and propagated; while, in reality, they are well known to be the ſafeſt of all others, both to mother and child. Nature, if left to itſelf, almoſt always brings them to an happy iſſue, and the only thing, of any real uſe, that has been done by the man-midwife, with all his parade, may amount to the adminiſtration of a clyſter, or the performance of ſome other little bedchamber office, which ſome people may ſuppoſe to belong, with full as much propriety, to the province of a nurſe.

But, leaving theſe general obſervations, let us come to the more immediate buſineſs of this ſection; namely, to enquire into the foundation of the boaſted ſuperiority of the men over the female midwives. And for the ſake of a more regular enquiry, the principal arguments, brought

brought to prove this point, may be ranged under the following heads.

1ſt. Their knowledge of anatomy, which leads them to a more intimate acquaintance with the ſtructure of the parts.

2dly. Their ſkill and ability in the uſe of inſtruments.

3dly. Their greater bodily ſtrength, which they ſay is of very great conſequence in preternatural labours. And,

4thly. Their ſkill in phyſic, which enables them to give proper directions about the lying-in women, and to obviate or cure any diſeaſes that may threaten or actually attack them.

1ſt. Of their knowledge of anatomy, and, in conſequence of that, their more accurate acquaintance with the ſtructure of the parts. This pretence might be of ſome weight, were the queſtion about publiſh-

publiſhing plates of the uterus in a gravid or an unimpregnated ſtate; or about any operation of ſurgery to be performed upon the parts themſelves, or upon any other that are adjoining, and immediately connected with them. But no ſuch thing is here either neceſſary or intended, nor is any ſuch minute acquaintance with arteries, veins, and nerves of the leaſt utility. It would be hard indeed if no one but an expert anatomiſt could acquire any knowledge of the female parts of generation. Even the women themſelves, however highly they are taught to think of anatomiſts, would hardly wiſh that this article of knowledge ſhould, either in theory or practice, be entirely confined to them. Let us at leaſt allow, that women may be acquainted with the common appearances of their own frame and make; and this, I believe I may venture to ſay, is all that is requiſite for the purpoſes of

any aſſiſtance that can be given in child-birth. But ſuppoſing that ſome advantage may be derived from an acquaintance with the bones of the pelvis, and the cavity formed by them; it will not I hope be denied, that they may be explained, and their uſes pointed out to a woman as eaſily as to a man, or that ſhe is capable of underſtanding at leaſt ſo much of anatomy, as to enable her to make a proper uſe of ſuch information. Of this, perhaps, more hereafter.

The 2d argument in favour of the men is drawn from their ſkill and ability in the uſe of inſtruments. This is their ſtrong hold, and on this principally they found their boaſted ſuperiority. This part of the buſineſs they ſet above all the reſt, as being that which particularly diſtinguiſhes midwifery as a profeſſion; and this they claim as belonging entirely to themſelves, and in which the women cannot

cannot poſſibly have any ſhare. To what all this boaſting amounts will appear if we conſider the true ſtate of the matter.

In the laſt ſection it was obſerved, that the uſe of inſtruments was well known among the ancients, which their ſurgeons employed whenever it proved neceſſary to bring away the child by the aſſiſtance of art. The inſtruments employed by them were the crotchet, ſciſſors, and knife; which were all in their turns made uſe of, according as the child could either be brought away entire, or the operator was under a neceſſary of ſeparating its limbs from its body in order to bring it away piece-meal; or when he thought it adviſeable to attempt the Cæſarean operation, in order to ſave the child at the probable expence of the mother's life.

Theſe were the only inſtruments employed or thought of till the end of the laſt, and beginning of the preſent century,

when ſome of theſe men, who were occaſionally employed in the delivery of women, invented and propoſed the uſe of inſtruments of another kind, and ſuch as might be employed with ſafety both to mother and child, and which were yet to be ſo efficacious, that they might be ſubſtituted and depended on in place of the crotchet, in moſt of the caſes where that formidable inſtrument had hitherto been uſed; and not only in ſuch caſes as theſe, but in all lingering labours they might alſo be employed, to bring away the child, and ſave the mother many a painful throe, to which her exhauſted ſtrength is ſuppoſed not to be equal.

I pretend not to enumerate all the contrivances of this ſort that have been introduced, and boaſted of, in their turns; nor to ſpeak of them according to the order of time in which they preceded or followed each other: let it ſuffice that I men-

I mention ſome of the principal of them, conſider what was propoſed by them and the manner in which they were to be uſed, and examine whether they have been found to be of that real utility which was at firſt pretended. Neither is it to my preſent purpoſe to ſpeak of ſuch inſtruments as have been invented to ſupply the place of, or to be brought in aid to the crotchet, without regarding the life of the infant, ſuch as the ſcrew fixed in the head of the child; Moriceau's *tire-tête*; Simpſon's ſcalp-ring; Ould's *terebra acuta*, &c. as all of them preſuppoſe the death of the child, or the neceſſity of deſtroying it in order to ſave the mother, which is no part of the pretended advantages of modern practice.

The *blunt hook* was, firſt, in much eſteem, on account of its ſafety and efficacy. The uſe of this was to lay hold of any part of the child that offered, and

to pull it along by main force. It was alledged that this might be done without any injury to the child, for the inſtrument, being blunt and round, could not poſſibly hurt it. But it was found upon trial, that if the inſtrument was fixed any where under the chin or jaws, and the force neceſſary to pull it along was uſed, the child was not only thereby much hurt, but it alſo gave the head ſuch a wrong direction, that it could not be delivered at any rate: objections of the ſame, or of an equally ſtrong nature appeared againſt its being fixed any where elſe; and therefore it was ſoon laid aſide as an inſtrument of no real *utility*.

Fillets of all ſorts, but eſpecially thoſe with a *nooſe*, were afterwards cried up as a rare invention, and many trials were made to render them uſeful; but all in vain, for in almoſt every trial it was found, either that the fillet had ſo precarious an

hold, if fixed upon any part of the head or face, that it ſlipped off as ſoon as the operator begun to pull with any degree of force; or if it was puſhed over the chin, the nooſe proved as fatal to the life of the child, as either knife, ſcrew, or crotchet could have been.

Theſe modern inventions were therefore very ſhort lived, and their abſolute inutility was ſoon diſcovered, which was no ſmall diſappointment to the new profeſſors of midwifery, and might have gone near to reduce them to their old level, had they not been timely relieved by the introduction of the celebrated *forceps*. This inſtrument was, for ſome time, in the poſſeſſion of a few practitioners only, nor has it been publickly known above forty years. But as ſoon as it was made public it is ſurpriſing with what avidity it was adopted, in ſo much that, for the firſt twenty years, the whole ſtudy

of the men-midwives was how to new model and improve its form and make, to delineate the various methods of uſing it, and to demonſtrate in what a variety of ſituations and poſitions of the child it might be ſerviceable; till they had by degrees found out, that there could hardly occur a caſe in midwifery, but where the forceps might be uſed with advantage. This was the very thing wiſhed for by the generality of theſe new adventurers, in order to ſecure to them a full poſſeſſion of the practice of their art; for by the help of this inſtrument, they had it in their power, ſometimes at leaſt, to do ſomething more than *amuſe and gain time*; they were enabled, if they were ſo diſpoſed, to ſhorten the duration of labour, and to fulfill the promiſes which their emiſſaries make for them, when they are firſt introduced. But if, after all, we examine the real utility of the

the inſtrument, I am afraid it will appear to be entirely on the ſide of the operator, and by no means on that of his patient *. The whole intention of the contrivance ſeems only to be to haſten a natural delivery, under pretence that the woman's ſtrength is not equal to the tedious

* It is very poſſible that the firſt inventors of the various modern contrivances had it in view to be really uſeful and ſerviceable to women in labour; but, as in moſt other caſes, it pretty plainly appears, that in this alſo, the principal motive was a view to their own intereſt, and to get poſſeſſion of a lucrative branch of buſineſs, to the excluſion of thoſe who had hitherto enjoyed it. How this matter really was, appears very plain from what is ſaid by Dr. Smellie in the firſt vol. of his Treatiſe on Midwifery, p. 248. "In difficult labours, where the child did not advance in a natural manner, and where it could not be turned and brought away by the feet, the method practiſed was to open the head and extract with the crotchet; and this expedient produced a general clamour among the women, who obſerved, that when recourſe was had to the aſſiſtance of a man-midwife, either the mother or

tedious duration of a lingering labour, and even that only when the head of the child preſents, for it is not pretended to be of ſervice in any preternatural labour, till the ſituation of the child is altered, and the head is brought to preſent fairly. This we may learn from the directions given

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" or child, or both, were loſt. This cenſure, which " could not fail of being a great diſcouragement " to male practitioners, ſtimulated the ingenuity of " ſeveral gentlemen of the profeſſion, in order to " contrive, &c."

This evidently ſhows what it was that ſtimulated theſe male practitioners, and ſet their wit to work. Nor have they been diſappointed; for though their contrivances have been, in truth, of very little ſervice to their patients, yet they have proved a matter of very great emolument to themſelves. Time and experience will convince us whether this be truly the caſe, or not. If a regard for the intereſt and greater ſafety of their patients has been hitherto their motive for the invention of their new new-fangled inſtruments, they will ſtill go on---the field is open; and their art is by no means carried to its *ne plus ultra* of perfection. But if they are perfectly ſatisfied

given for the uſe of the forceps, which always ſuppoſe that the child is ſo far advanced in the pelvis as to give an opportunity for fixing this pair of artificial hands (as they are called) quite as far as the ears, or over the face and hind-head. According to this, it muſt neceſſarily be ſuppoſed, that nature has already done the greateſt part of the work, by bringing the

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ſatisfied, that either the women want no aſſiſtance in their labour, or that they cannot be benefited by any contrivance of this kind; and if the true motive that whetted their invention was a regard to their own intereſt only; they will ſtop ſhort, and ſit down contented with what has been done already. I am, for my own part, inclined to believe, and will venture to foretell, that we ſhall hear no more of new inſtruments, or methods of delivery hitherto untried. The inventors have obtained their end———their purſes are full; and their ſtimulus has loſt its point. "*Ibit, qui zonam perdidit.*" Let the midwives whet their wit, and ſee what they can get by invention, or whither it will ſuggeſt to them ways and means to recover the buſineſs they have loſt.

the child ſo far; but then it is pretended, that ſhe is unable to compleat the whole, and therefore the forceps are employed to finiſh the reſt. Taken in this light, the uſe of the forceps is reduced to a very narrow compaſs, and confined to a very few caſes; but I believe we may go a ſtep further, and ſay, that even in theſe caſes, they only bring a child into the world a few hours, perhaps, before the time it would be delivered by the natural pains of the mother; for it ſeems abundantly plain, that where nature is able to do ſo much as is here ſuppoſed, it ſeldom or never fails to accompliſh the reſt, if ſufficient time be allowed, and the ſtrength of the mother properly ſupported during that time; and I believe I may defy any man-midwife to ſhew me an inſtance, where either mother or child was loſt in this ſituation, when theſe precautions were uſed, and, perhaps, the ſituation

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and poſture of the woman were frequently changed. I can hardly therefore fancy myſelf exceedingly preſumptuous, if I declare the forceps to be quite as uſeleſs to women in labour, as either the blunt hook, or fillet. But I muſt beg leave to go ſtill a little further upon this head, and obſerve, that this is not only an uſeleſs, but alſo a very pernicious inſtrument; for by haſtening delivery before the parts are properly diſtended by the natural pains and ſtrainings of the mother, ſuch dreadful lacerations are made, both internally and externally, as muſt frequently prove fatal, or, at beſt, the ſource of much inconvenience and miſery, for the reſt of her life, to the unfortunate woman who has been the ſubject of ſuch practices. And to prove that this is not theory and ſuppoſition, but a true repreſentation of what naturally happens, I will venture to appeal to the experience of

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almoſt every woman upon whom thoſe ingenious operators have ſhown their dexterity, and ſkill in the uſe of their forceps.

Nor am I, by any means, ſingular in my opinion of the inutility of this inſtrument. The beſt practitioners in midwifery have given it up, and very ſeldom have recourſe to it; and I am credibly informed, that the man who has, for many years, been deſervedly eſteemed the practitioner of the greateſt ſkill and judgement of any who profeſs the obſtetric art in this kingdom, declares, that he has ſeldom or never, during the whole courſe of his practice, uſed the forceps, or met with a caſe where he thought it neceſſary to do ſo; unleſs he may be ſaid to uſe them when he occaſionally introduces a ſingle blade, to remove any impediment which the head of the child may accidentally meet with,

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by preſſing upon ſome of the bones of the pelvis, whereby its deſcent and delivery are retarded; but, he adds, that occaſions for this very ſeldom happened, as he could almoſt always get the better of ſuch obſtacles with his hand only.

But if, after all, we ſhould ſuppoſe the forceps to be in reality an uſeful inſtrument; why may it not be uſed by a woman as well as by a man *? The art of fixing it is no ſuch myſtery; and the half turn over the pubes, in extracting

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* Some women, I am told, do uſe them, and I am ſorry to hear it; but theirs is a deſperate ſituation; they find themſelves ſinking, and going out of faſhion every day, and they are willing to catch at every thing they can lay hold of to ſupport their credit. They find the men careſſed on account of the aſſiſtance they give, by uſing their inſtruments; and therefore they fancy, that, if they can uſe inſtruments alſo, they ſhall recover the ground they have loſt. But they miſtake the matter---It is not for the ſake of their forceps only that the men are preferred to them.

ing the child with it, is no ſuch maſter-piece of ſkill, but that a woman may attain to a proper knowledge of, and a ſufficient dexterity in it. We may allow her, at leaſt, the uſe of the ſingle blade, which, I dare ſay, ſhe will employ with as much tenderneſs and caution as any man alive can do, and will be as much afraid of putting out an eye, cruſhing a noſe, or maiming any other part, whether the head or breech preſents, as any male practitioners whatever.

Thus then it appears, that all the modern inventions, and new inſtruments introduced by our men-midwives, are not only uſeleſs, but often pernicious. They afford a pretence, to the preſuming and ignorant part of the profeſſion, to be buſy, and to attempt what they ought carefully to avoid; and conſidering how many there are of that ſtamp, we are well juſtified in ſaying, that ſo far from bring-

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ing help and ſafety, they have proved the inſtruments of deſtruction or miſery to many hundreds, both of women and children. The more ſkilful and cautious may indeed avoid doing miſchief; but they do ſo chiefly by avoiding the uſe of ſuch inſtruments. The boaſted ſuperiority therefore of the men, upon this account, is a mere pretence, and an impoſition upon the world, entirely calculated to ſerve their own ſelfiſh views; and they are really and truly in the ſame ſituatiou, with regard to the uſe of inſtruments, that ſurgeons were two thouſand years ago; nor can they afford any more real aſſiſtance to a woman in labour than a female practitioner can do, except in ſuch unhappy caſes, where the crotchets, ſciſſors, or knife become neceſſary.

But, even upon this ſuppoſition, our obſtetric leeches (who do not eaſily quit

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their hold when once they have faſtened) find a pretence to be employed, in every common, as well as in every difficult caſe: for, ſay they, if a man's aſſiſtance is wanted on theſe deſperate occaſions, he ought to be allowed to attend natural and common labours, in order that he may be more expert, and better acquainted with the manner of proceeding when he is expected to operate; and alſo that he may be at hand, and able to judge when his aſſiſtance as a ſurgeon becomes neceſſary. Let us ſee what this plauſible pretence amounts to. A man, I apprehend, is prepared to uſe his inſtruments properly, and, by their help, to ſeparate a child from the body of its mother, by a previous knowledge of the ſtructure of the parts of the mother, the ſituation of the child in theſe parts, and the various ways in which it may paſs through them; and he acquires dexterity

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in this, as in every other operation of ſurgery, by repeated practice and experience. Nor can he receive the leaſt inſtruction or information, for theſe purpoſes, by attending a thouſand natural labours, where, if he is an honeſt and ſkilful man, he will do nothing at all; or if he is otherwiſe, he may teaſe and torment the poor women by repeated examinations, during every pain; but he will never thereby learn how to open a child's head, and afterwards to bring it away by the help of his crotchets. As well may a man pretend, by frequent feeling and handling a limb, to learn how to cut it off; or by frequently puting his finger into a mouth, learn how to extract a tooth. As for the neceſſity or utility of his being at hand to judge when it is proper to proceed to ſuch operations, he may as well alledge the neceſſity of being conſtantly in the houſe

with a big-bellied woman, and examining her every half hour, in order to know when ſhe is likely to be in labour. Operations of ſuch a nature are not to be undertaken ſo haſtily, and the woman in labour ought to wait not only hours, but days, in hopes that nature may relieve itſelf, before ſo dreadful a reſolution is taken with regard to her; and if a midwife be properly inſtructed in her buſineſs, ſhe may judge, full as well as a man can do, when nature can make no further efforts for its own relief, or when every effort it can make muſt evidently be ineffectual; that is, when ſuch an obſtruction to the delivery of the child is in the way, as can only be removed by art, and downright violence; and in ſuch caſes ſhe will not fail, on her own, as well as on account of her patient, to call for the ſurgeon's aſſiſtance.

Under this head, of the various contrivances and methods of giving aſſiſtance to women in labour, ought to be mentioned that of turning the child, and bringing it away by the feet. Had this been an operation peculiar to the men, and in which they could have boaſted a ſuperiority over the women midwives, we ſhould have heard much of its great utility and excellency; but as it has been in all ages and ſtill continues to be practiſed by the women, full as well and as ſucceſsfully as by the men, we hear the leſs of it; though it is the principal reſource in every ſudden emergency and danger, whether ariſing from hæmorrhages or any other cauſe; it is ſafe, and often not very difficult, and (except that which is given by the crotchet, in ſuch unhappy caſes where it is required) it is in fact almoſt the only real aſſiſtance that can be given to women in labour, by

either male or female practitioners. My obſervation, that this operation is not peculiar to the male practitioner, may obviate another pretence which he makes for being called in and employed, upon the appearance, viz. of blood, or whenever a flooding comes on. The alarm which this ſymptom generally occaſions yields an excellent opportunity for thoſe who wiſh to introduce a man-midwife; but if they chooſe to have their fears quieted, they may reſt aſſured, that they are as ſafe with their woman, in ſuch a ſituation, as they poſſibly can be with any man-midwife whatever. Relief is only to be given by turning the child, and bringing it away by the feet, as ſoon as poſſible, and as it is allowed that this operation may be performed by the women as well as by the men, there can be no juſt pretence, on that account, to diſplace the former in favour of the latter.

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Let us now, in the third place, examine the advantages which the men derive from their ſuperior bodily ſtrength. This is ſuch a pretence that one would hardly believe them in earneſt when they advance it, did it not appear, both from their writings and converſation, that they lay a conſiderable ſtreſs upon it, and boaſt of their ſuperiority over women, in all preternatural labours, on that every account. I remember, ſome years ago, to have ſeen a coloured print of a celebrated man-midwife, at that time pretty much the ſubject of converſation, on account of ſome ſuppoſed inhumanity in his practice. He was repreſented as a luſty ſtrong man, without his coat, and having his ſhirt ſleeve turned up to his ſhoulder, with a remarkably large hand, and a brawny arm, covered with blood up to the elbow, and expoſing a child, which was repreſented as dead, and of

which a ſlender little woman was ſuppoſed to have been juſt delivered. Under this print was wrote, in very legible characters, *Voila l'accoucheur !* —— *The true picture of a man-widwife !* But without attempting a ſerious anſwer to ſo abſurd an argument, let me aſk any woman, whether ſhe ever choſe her man-midwife for the ſake of his ſuperior ſtrength, the large muſcular ſize of his limbs, or force and firmneſs of his ſinews ? If ſhe anſwers in the affirmative, I leave it to others to form a judgement of her motives for employing him. But that dexterity and ſkill, and not mere bodily ſtrength, are the true obſtetrical qualifications, appears from the remarkable celebrity of ſome of the profeſſion, who have not perhaps half the ſtrength of many of the women who practice that art.

The fourth argument, which the men uſe to prove their ſuperiority over the women, is taken from their ſkill in phyſic, which enables them to direct a more proper regimen, and preſcribe more efficacious remedies for their patients, than the women can pretend to do, or indeed than any branch of the medical faculty, beſides themſelves, can do, becauſe they have not the ſame opportunities, of being acquainted with the diſorders of childbed women, that they enjoy.

Sir John Falſtaff, I remember, calls his hoſteſs *an otter*, and the reaſon he gives for it is, " that a man knows " not where to have her." I hope I ſhall not be thought to treat the matter ludicrouſly, if I apply the ſame name to the gentlemen with whom I am arguing, and for the ſame reaſon; for I ſeriouſly proteſt, that I know not where to have them, nor do I ever ſee one of the fraternity

nity but he puts me in mind of that amphibious animal. The very appellation they aſſume of *men-midwives* indicates ſomething out of the common track, and would make us fancy them to be a mixed ſpecies, what we call hermaphrodites, or a confuſion of the two ſexes in one perſon. They certainly aſſume very different forms, and a great variety of appearances.—Sometimes they are ſurgeons, ſometimes apothecaries, ſometimes midwives, very often nurſes, and now they are phyſicians.—In ſhort, they are every thing by turns, and become all things to all women, in hopes of gaining them all.

We are told, that in former ages the different branches of the medical art were profeſſed and exerciſed by the ſame perſon; but in latter times it has been deemed a much better method to ſeparate them, and aſſign diſtinct branches to different

ferent perſons, with a view to render each of them more perfect in his peculiar department, while he applied to that alone, and his time and attention were not engaged or drawn aſide by the others. This plan, and this ſeparation, the ſurgeons, as well as the other members of the faculty, profeſſedly approve of, and they pretend to detach themſelves from every branch of the medical art, beſides their own. How happens it then, that the moment they commence men-midwives, they become phyſicians alſo? Is the knowledge of phyſic ſo eaſily attained, that they can acquire it in a day, or upon aſſuming a new name? Or were they always doctors in diſguiſe? I readily allow, that theſe gentlemen may have ſeveral reaſons for aſſuming the province, and ſometimes the denomination of phyſicians. If they are apothecary-midwives, the more numerous their preſcriptions are,

are, ſo much the better; for whatever good or harm they may do the patient, they are ſure to be of ſingular ſervice in making out the bill. A ſurgeon-midwife may perhaps fancy, that he adds to his dignity and conſequence by aſſuming this additional province or title; he paſſes for a man of more profound erudition while he is known to write Latin, and to underſtand other ſtrange languages. But, what is of more uſe, he ſupplies the place of, and keeps at a diſtance, thoſe who practice phyſic only, whom he may ſuſpect of not looking upon him with the moſt friendly aſpect, and to whoſe prying eyes he may not care to lay open all his practices. This is a point which, I am told, all ſurgeon-midwives have much at heart, and that they will go any lengths to prevent a regular phyſician from being called to their child-bed women, whatever their complaints may be, or of however

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dangerous a tendency. How far the intereſt of their patients is conſidered in this manner of proceeding, every one muſt form his own judgement; for my own part, I moſt ſincerely pity the woman who does really want the aſſiſtance of phyſic, if her life and health are to depend upon the preſcriptions of her man-midwife. Their pretences to this character are ſupported at preſent, in ſome meaſure, by faſhion and novelty; but experience will, by degrees, make people wiſe, and when a few more victims have been ſacrificed to ſelf-ſufficiency and ignorance, mankind may perhaps have their eyes opened, and find out their miſtake. I muſt, upon the whole, beg leave to declare, that, ſo far from preferring a man-midwife on account of his ſkill in phyſic, his very pretending to it would, with me, be a moſt material objection againſt employing him at all.

Theſe

Theſe are the avowed pretences, upon which men are ſaid to be preferable to women midwives; and theſe are, I believe, the principal arguments by which, in their writings, they ſupport their aſſumed ſuperiority. But that none of their innovations or improvements may be concealed, I muſt beg leave to mention a circumſtance or two, in which their practice may perhaps be ſuppoſed, ſometimes, to differ from that of their predeceſſors in the art; and in which, as in every thing elſe, they are affirmed, by thoſe who employ them, to be greatly their ſuperiors.

It ſometimes happens, that it may be of conſequence, both to a woman herſelf, on account of her health, and alſo to thoſe who are connected with her, on that, or perhaps on other accounts, to be informed whether ſhe is with child or not. In ſuch caſes, the marks of pregnancy

muſt be enquired into, and as they are univerſally known, and accurately deſcribed by every writer on midwifery, and as women are to the full as well acquainted with them as the men even pretend to be, one might expect, that in this matter, at leaſt, their ſex would procure them a preference; for here, ſurely, there can be no pretence of ſafety in employing men, nor of riſk and danger in truſting to women. But that is by no means the caſe, for (no matter on what account, but) even on theſe occaſions, we ſtill find that the male practitioner is preferred: and indeed it is ſurpriſing, what an alteration there is in this part of the buſineſs ſince men came to be employed in it. Enquiries about pregnancy were formerly rare, and upon extraordinary occaſions, when ſomething was ſuſpected to be amiſs either with the woman or the child; but now it is found

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neceſſary, that they ſhould be repeated again and again, in every breeding woman, and every time ſhe is with child; and ſhe is deemed to be in an unſafe ſtate unleſs ſhe is frequently *examined* by her operator, who either attends her call, or makes her many voluntary viſits for that purpoſe. I own, I have often obſerved with aſtoniſhment the eaſe and unconcern with which a woman and her friends do ſometimes talk of the ceremony of her being *examined by her man-midwife*. The words, indeed, are harmleſs, and the phraſe implies nothing indecent; and I am perſuaded that this very circumſtance induces many a woman to talk of, or perhaps to ſubmit to it, with leſs reluctance than ſhe otherwiſe would do; whereas, were it to be explained, in plain terms, what is to paſs when he does examine her, ſhe might perhaps (for the firſt time at leaſt) feel

feel herſelf ſomewhat embarraſſed in ſending for a man, to attend her for ſuch a purpoſe. I remember a little anecdote which may help to ſet this matter in a proper light.

A lady, who was married while very young, was, in her firſt pregnancy, told of the neceſſity of employing a man-midwife, and of conſulting him ſome time before ſhe ſhould be in labour; and ſhe accordingly ſent for Dr. Smellie, who was recommended to her by thoſe who had employed him. When the Doctor came, he deſired leave to examine her, which ſhe had been taught to expect, and was ready to comply with. He put her into a proper attitude for that purpoſe, which ſhe did not object to, as ſhe had no ſuſpicion of what was to follow. But when ſhe found the Doctor had got — "the lord knows where"— ſhe ſtarted up, and turning to him, with the moſt fooliſh

face of aſtoniſhment and confuſion —— "Lord, ſir! what are you about?" The good old man (who of all men living was the fitteſt to be truſted with a woman in any ſituation or attitude whatever) only ſmiled, and told her, that when ſhe was more uſed to theſe things, ſhe would not mind them. Nor was he miſtaken — The breach was made, and not only the good old doctor, but other obſtetric doctors alſo, whom ſhe employed after he retired from buſineſs, have had free acceſs on the ſame occaſions, without raiſing the ſame alarms. At leaſt I ſuppoſe ſo, as the lady has, ſince that time, been the mother of many children, and has conſtantly employed male practitioners. However, I owe her the juſtice to declare, that I believe her to be what is called *ſtrictly virtuous*; nor had ſhe loſt all ſenſe of delicacy, for, I was informed that ſhe bluſhed when ſhe told her tale.

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If it be not an unfair queſtion, I would beg leave, on this occaſion, to aſk any of thoſe gentlemen examiners, whether he always regulates his examinations by the utility they are of to his patients, and whether he never did examine any of them oftener, or carry his examinations farther, than the neceſſity of her ſituation required? If he can anſwer in the affirmative, I muſt deem him *more* or *leſs* than man; for I look upon it to be as impoſſible, upon ſuch occaſions, to forget the difference of ſex, as it is for a man not to ſee, whoſe eyes are ſound, and who ſtands with them open, in broad daylight.

Another circumſtance, in which the men have an acknowledged advantage over the women, I would mention, if I knew what terms to uſe in conveying a proper idea of it; I mean the endeavours uſed to direct the parts of generation by ſlow

and gentle degrees, that the child may be brought into the world with more eaſe, and leſs hazard to the mother. In books of midwifery, I find the authors ſpeak of it under the denomination of *ſtretching and lubricating the parts*. This practice is much recommended by them, and great ſtreſs is laid upon it. It is the principal means employed to amuſe the women in lingering labours, and to perſuade them that ſomething is doing for their relief, and to haſten the birth of the child, in a manner conſiſtent with their ſafety. Nay ſo very particular are theſe writers about this matter, that they even give directions for the form in which the hand is to be introduced for this purpoſe, with the fingers, viz. and thumb moulded into the ſhape of a cone, or round tapering wedge, and ſmeared with oil and pomatum. It is ſaid, that this practice was not known, or thought of, till men came to be concerned

cnrned in the buſineſs. It is certain that they are very fond of it; and I am told many of them regard and recommend it, as not only uſeful during labour itſelf, but alſo for ſome conſiderable time before that period *. I am alſo informed, that the women midwives have, ſince its introduction, been ſimple enough to attempt the ſame practice, fancying that it may really be of ſome uſe to their patients. But with very indifferent ſucceſs; for whether they are awkward in their manner of doing it, whether there is a deficiency in the true form of the conical obſtetric hand, or whatever cauſe it may be owing to, I cannot tell, but whenever they do

* It is ſuppoſed, that ſomething of this kind paſſes at moſt of the examinations above mentioned. But as writers in midwifery are ſilent about the whole of this matter, and as I make it a rule to advance nothing but what I have their authority for, I ſpeak with diffidence; and do not pretend to inſiſt an the truth and certainty of it.

attempt it, their patients ſeldom fail to complain of being teazed and tormented, without perceiving the ſmalleſt advantage from it. Let me admoniſh them therefore to lay it entirely aſide; nor, in following my advice, need they be afraid of omitting any uſeful part of their duty. In a medical light, it is an uſeleſs and an abominable practice. Nature, who is the only true midwife, has taken ſufficient care of the gradual diſtenſion neceſſary for the preſervation of both mother and child; and all ſuch idle and ſtrange attempts as this can only be contrived to impoſe upon the credulous and ignorant. Nor is it only an idle and uſeleſs, but it is often a dangerous practice; for, if the obſtetric hand ſhould be employed too often, or without proper precaution, an irritation will naturally ariſe, and labour be hurried on before its time, with the manifeſt

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hazard of injuring both mother and child. Complaints have been made, that ſuch conſequences have followed, and ungenerous inſinuations thrown out, that the operator was not ſorry for it, his attendance having been required elſewhere; but I hope, and for my own part I do moſt ſincerely believe, that ſuch inſinuations are entirely groundleſs.

SECTION III.

I HAVE now conſidered, and I hope with candour, all the pretences I could meet with, which are made uſe of by the men, and their adherents, to prove that they ought to be preferred to women midwives, by every one who has a regard either for her own, or the ſafety of her unborn infant. I have proved to the ſatisfaction of my own mind, and I hope to that of my readers, that all ſuch pretences are frivolous and falſe; and that every one who is not biaſed by other motives, may reſt aſſured, that ſhe is quite as ſafe in the hands of a well-informed midwife, as ſhe would be in thoſe of any male practitioner whatever. Preſuming therefore upon this, I will venture to make ſome general obſervations, which

might perhaps have come in more properly under ſome of the above articles, only they might there have too much interrupted what was more immediately under conſideration.

Obſervation I. I have above made mention of the qualifications of the midwives, whom I would recommend in preference even to the beſt male practitioners. I there preſumed to ſuppoſe, that they might have the ſame advantages of education, in what immediately relates to the buſineſs of their profeſſion, that men enjoy; and I here would endeavour to ſhow, that this is no abſurd or impracticable ſuppoſition. A ſingle preliminary lecture on the bones of the pelvis, and on ſome preparations neceſſary to ſhow the ſituation of the womb, and alſo of the child in the cavity formed by thoſe bones, with the manner in which the latter paſſes thro' that cavity in time of labour, is all that

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is neceſſary to give them proper ideas, and fit them to receive every kind of inſtruction requiſite to accompliſh them for the practice of their art. Such ſubſequent inſtructions they muſt receive, from examining the appearances in pregnant women, and attending a ſufficient number of labours, under the direction of thoſe who are already ſkilled in their profeſſion. As for the proper treatment of women, both before, during the time of, and after labour is over, it may be learned by reading, or by obſerving the practice of thoſe to whoſe inſtructions they are ſuppoſed to attend. In a neighbouring country, where the modeſty, as well as the ſafety of their child-bearing women is not deemed unworthy of the care of government itſelf, this matter is attended to with prudence and judgement: I mean in Holland, where profeſſors of midwifery are eſtabliſhed in different towns, who have ſalaries paid by

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the public, and whoſe buſineſs it is to give all neceſſary inſtructions to women who are to be trained up in that practice; and theſe women, after they are ſuppoſed to be properly qualified, are obliged to undergo an examination by ſome of the medical faculty, before they have a certificate or licence given them; and without ſuch a certificate no woman is there allowed to act as a midwife. In this kingdom indeed, whoſe conſtitution and liberties require that every one ſhould be allowed to aſſume whatever character and profeſſion he pleaſes, however he may be qualified for it, no ſuch regulation can be expected; but even here I have with pleaſure obſerved ſuch propoſals publiſhed, as would fully anſwer the end propoſed, without any regulation or reſtriction; I mean the advertiſement from one of the lying-in hoſpitals in London, inviting female pupils to attend, and receive inſtructions in

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what relates to their profeſſion. Theſe propoſals will, I hope, meet with the ſucceſs they deſerve. They offer exactly ſuch an opportunity as women ought to wiſh for, who may there receive the principal part of their inſtructions, and be taught how to conduct themſelves towards their patients, and give them all the aſſiſtance they have occaſion for, by one of their own ſex; the matron I mean, or midwife of the hoſpital. In order to render this ſchool of midwifery more complete, it would be an excellent addition to the preſent plan, if the phyſicians and ſurgeons, who are appointed to attend occaſionally, and to give their aſſiſtance when wanted, in the immediate buſineſs of their profeſſion, were to give the introductory lecture I ſpeak of, and to explain to the women the ſituation of the pelvis, and its contents. Or, if that ſhould be deemed an additional trouble to theſe gentlemen, which they

might

might not care for, the midwife herſelf might ſoon and eaſily be enabled to point out and explain to them all that is neceſſary. This is a proper ſchool for women in this further reſpect alſo, that no men pupils are allowed to attend there; which is particularly taken notice of in the propoſals, and is a very humane as well as prudent precaution in the conſiderate and decent ſupporters of that excellent charity; for it is hardly to be believed, what inſolent behaviour women pupils experience from thoſe of the other ſex, when they attend midwifery lectures and labours together, as has ſometimes been the caſe. Theſe unbred and unlettered young men, fancying themſelves in poſſeſſion, and ſolely entitled to the practice of a lucrative profeſſion, and looking upon all female practitioners as intruders, uſe every art, and take every opportunity to brow-beat, ridicule, and uſe them ill. Of this I have

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heard ſeveral women complain ; and even ſome of the men, of a more ſober way of thinking, and more decent manners than the reſt, have acknowledged it to be true, and ſeemed aſhamed of it. A conſiderable objection lies againſt this plan for the education of women, ariſing from the expence attending it, which is but ill ſuited to the circumſtances of thoſe among them who have hitherto practiſed midwifery ; but this would be eaſily obviated, were they to be re-eſtabliſhed in the practice of that art ; for if a woman were ſure of being able to live by a profeſſion, her parents or other relations would readily beſtow whatever fortune they had to give her, in training her up to midwifery, in the ſame manner as they would to any other buſineſs. Not to mention, that the profeſſion would on theſe ſuppoſitions put on a different, and a more reputable appearance, and would become no inconſiderable

ſiderable object for thoſe in a more creditable ſituation of life, who would be glad to defray the expence, and undertake the office. Or, as it may often happen, if a prudent ſenſible woman (perhaps the mother of many children, who are to be ſupported by her induſtry) were to ſhow an inclination, and diſcover a fitneſs for this undertaking, I know not how humanity and benevolence could be exerted more for the general advantage of the community, than in aſſiſting ſuch a woman to acquire the neceſſary qualifications, and to enable her to take care of the ſafety, at the ſame time that ſhe preſerves the modeſty, of her country women.

Obſervation II. It would be an invidious enquiry, and I ſuppoſe a point impoſſible to be aſcertained, whether men or women are moſt ſucceſsful in their practice. If we are to believe thoſe who pretend to calculate the numbers of mankind, we

are informed by them that population is much decreaſed, and the number of people in theſe kingdoms greatly leſſened within theſe laſt hundred years. It is nearly ſo long ſince men-midwives have buſied their heads and their hands in preſerving the lives of our women and children; but whether they are chargeable, in any degree, with this depopulation, I do not take upon me to ſay. From what appeared above, that the man-midwife is in general obliged to be buſy, and to do a great deal, in order to ſupport his pretended ſuperiority, while the women are contented to leave to nature what is properly her own work, I ſhould expect that the ſucceſs of the latter would be proportionally greater. But after all that can be ſaid on this ſubject, every one will form his judgement of the matter from his own obſervation, and from what comes immediately within his own cognizance.

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Obſervation III. In the introduction to theſe conſiderations, it was alledged, that one of the cauſes of the diſſolute manners, for which our women are ſo deſervedly ſtigmatized, is the promiſcuous and univerſal uſe of men-midwives. If, in conſequence of this aſſertion, any one ſhould charge me with accuſing every woman who employs a man-midwife of being unchaſte, he does me great wrong. I do by no means ſay, that employing a man-midwife is a breach of chaſtity. I am well convinced that there are many women, who are taught to believe that they cannot be ſafe but in the hands of theſe men, and who, in the ſimplicity of their hearts, ſubmit to every thing they are pleaſed to call neceſſary, as a refuſal in any one circumſtance might (in their apprehenſion) be of fatal or bad conſequence to themſelves. This, I ſay, they are taught to believe, by thoſe who have em-

ployed men on ſuch occaſions, and who are willing to be kept in countenance by as many of their friends and acquaintance as they have intereſt with. Such women as theſe I am ſorry for, and I have taken ſome pains, in the foregoing pages, to diſabuſe and ſet them right, in a matter wherein they are moſt egregiouſly miſled. But let me further add, that though their intentions are upright, and they are conſcious of meaning nothing wrong, yet they tread in a ſlippery path, in which if they long continue, they will hardly eſcape a fall. I have ſaid, that to employ a man-midwife is no immediate breach of chaſtity, but I cannot help ſaying alſo, that it certainly paves the way for it. The woman who has admitted her man-midwife to ſuch familiarities with her perſon as his profeſſion gives him a pretence, and he is well diſpoſed to take, will not be ſo much ſhocked by attempts

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of the ſame nature from thoſe who are not of the profeſſion, as if ſhe had never admitted any other man beſides her huſband to theſe liberties: ſhe is therefore thrown off her guard, and becomes an eaſier prey to any invader who may have a deſign upon her. If this be a true repreſentation of the caſe, we may, I think, fairly aſſert, that though it may not be abſolutely a crime to employ men in that profeſſion, yet it certainly has an immoral tendency; and thoſe who encourage it will do well to conſider how they can anſwer for all the fatal conſequences that ſo frequently attend the advice they have given. Men-midwives not only pave the way for the ſucceſs of other men, in their diſhonourable attempts, but we are well authorized to ſay, that many women have been debauched by theſe very men-midwives themſelves, who might probably have led chaſte and unblameable lives,

had they not been expoſed to their pernicious, practices and to the opportunities they enjoy, for that purpoſe, ſuperior to any other ſet of men whatever.

Obſervation IV. It ſeems proper to take notice of what is often alledged by the women, as a reaſon for employing men, or at leaſt as a pretence that may exculpate them from any charge of immodeſty on that account; "that when they are "in labour, they are in ſuch miſery "and diſtreſs, that they neither know "nor care who is employed about them, "ſo they can procure any relief." I readily allow that this may ſometimes be the caſe, viz. when the ſurgeon's art and inſtruments become neceſſary to extract the child, and the unhappy woman is ſuppoſed to be racked with extremity of pain: but I believe it to be true in no other caſe, even in time of labour, during which

which we all know there are many intervals, when a woman can ſee and feel much in the ſame way as ſhe does when in perfect health: and much leſs can I believe it to be true at theſe times when they are undergoing the various and repeated examinations, deemed ſo neceſſary, long before the period of labour. Indeed I do not know whether, upon theſe occaſions, women even pretend to be ignorant of, or inattentive to the ſex of the perſon employed.

Obſervation V. I muſt beg leave to ſay one word to the huſbands of ſuch wives as are fond of employing men-midwives. Some of them are, I believe, really convinced, that their wives cannot be ſafe without ſuch aſſiſtance, and therefore conſent to their being employed, from a motive of tenderneſs and affection for the woman they love. Such huſbands

I pity — their love has made them blind, and they cannot ſee the errors into which the woman, on whom they doat, is falling, nor the pointed miſchiefs that are probably preparing to wound their peace of mind.

Some huſbands conſider it as a matter of indifference to them, who attends their wives when in labour; they leave them to their own choice, or rather to the direction of their female goſſips, who are probably well inſtructed in the difference there is between midwives of each ſex, and who, of courſe, know well how to inſtruct and direct the novices of their acquaintance. Such huſbands I greatly blame, and, though I would not recommend harſhneſs in their manner of treating their wives, when they ſhow an inclination to employ a man; yet, as they regard the welfare, the comfort, and ho-

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nour of themſelves and their family, I would have them uſe proper and gentle methods to diſſuade them from ſuch a purpoſe, and conſider it as a matter of more conſequence than they are aware of, who the perſon is whom they employ as a midwife.

But there are other huſbands ſtill, of whom I know not in what terms to ſpeak, or how to believe what is alledged — that they, in ſome meaſure, compel their wives to ſubmit to the practices of the men we are ſpeaking of. I have heard of ſeveral women, who, by way of apology for what they could not help thinking wanted one, have alledged, " that their " huſbands made a point of it;" while every one who knew upon what terms they lived with theſe huſbands, knew well that the motive for making ſuch a point could not be tenderneſs and affection, or

a regard to their ſafety. What motive then ſhall we aſſign? I muſt leave it to every one to aſſign ſuch a motive as may to himſelf appear moſt probable; declaring that, for my own part, I can aſſign none at all; and that I am at a loſs to know whether there are ſuch huſbands, or whether their wives only make uſe of their pretended authority as a decent cloak to cover their own inclinations. I can eaſily ſuppoſe a great intimacy to ſubſiſt between ſuch huſbands and thoſe men who practice midwifery; and I can ſuppoſe that the former have, on many occaſions, and on ſeveral accounts, been, and perhaps continue to be, under obligations to the latter, both for their ſkill and ſecrecy; but I cannot ſuppoſe that, on theſe accounts, they would make a ſacrifice of their wives modeſt inclinations, in order to oblige them, and promote their intereſt. However, if there

are ſuch huſbands, I cannot help entertaining a ſecret wiſh, that their wives may treat them as they deſerve, and bring upon them the infamy they ſo earneſtly labour for.

Obſervation VI. This commerce between our married women and their male aſſiſtants is now riſen to ſuch an height, as to become a matter of ſerious conſideration to the whole community. The privilege theſe perſons claim of entering every man's houſe where they can gain admittance, and of being as often and as long in private with his wife as they think proper, is a proceeding we have never hitherto met with, or even heard of; nor is it poſſible to ſay, to what baſe purpoſes ſuch privileges may be converted. When confeſſion was the faſhion in this country, the prieſts never had, even under that ſacred pretence, ſuch oppor-

opportunities as theſe, and yet many, who were themſelves good catholics, did often plead for a reformation in this article, fearing leſt the virtue of their wives and daughters might be endangered by the frequent private viſits of theſe ſpiritual guides; and ſome of that perſuaſion did not confine themſelves to fears and ſuſpicions only, but they ſpoke more freely, and loudly exclaimed againſt the ſacred order, accuſing the young men among them of debauching their women in their own perſons, while the old ones pimped for them, and procured them gallants more for their purpoſe. How far ſuch practices are chargeable upon thoſe who, in our days, ſucceed them in their intimacy with our women, I do not pretend to ſay; but if we compare the manners of the preſent with thoſe of former times, I doubt we can hardly, with all our charity, ſuppoſe, that any opportunity for

the gratification and indulgence of ſenſual appetites, which was then embraced, is now loſt or neglected. I know not in what light theſe practices may ſtrike others, but, for my own part, I think the virtuous part of the world would be no inconſiderable gainers were this order of men to be ſuppreſſed, as other orders have formerly been, becauſe their conduct and practices were contrary to ſound morals; but I do not wiſh to ſee it ſuppreſſed in the ſame manner, or by the ſame power that they were — I call not for the ſecular arm, and ſorry ſhould I be to ſee it interfere in matters of this kind; but I moſt earneſtly call upon thoſe who are leaders of our faſhions, and I adjure them by all the ideas they may formerly have had, and by any remains of reſpect they ſtill may retain for modeſty and decency, to put a ſtop to this flagrant enormity. They only have the

power

power to ſtop its progreſs; on them its continuance depends, and are they accountable for every ill conſequence that may attend it.

Thus have I endeavoured to ſet the preſent practice of midwifery in a true light, and to ſhow the very probable influence it has upon the manners of the preſent age; and (what cannot be done in every caſe) I have pointed out a remedy, and an eaſy and natural one, to rectify what is amiſs. But I dare not, after all, flatter myſelf, that any thing I can write will have an influence upon, or produce an alteration in the preſent mode. The difficulties in the way are much too powerful for me to hope to remove them; the paſſions, viz. and appetites, or perhaps a fondneſs for faſhion and novelty, on the ſide of the woman; and the ſtrong ſelf-intereſt, and the cunning

ning or addreſs of the men employed by them. However, if I can ſtir up thoſe who are much better qualified than I pretend to be to engage in the cauſe; if I can perſuade the world in general to conſider this practice candidly and without prejudice; and if I can induce thoſe who are principally concerned in it, to be upon their guard againſt the falſe inſinuations that are thrown out againſt practitioners of their own ſex, and to conſider the conſequence of introducing men upon every occaſion, where the moſt common idea of decency requires their abſence; the end of this publication will in ſome meaſure be anſwered.

It may be perhaps alledged, that I have done nothing more than revive the old hackneyed arguments againſt the preſent practice, and that I ought not there-

fore

fore to expect more ſucceſs than others have had before me. It is true, they are old arguments, but they are ſuch as never have been anſwered, nor ever can be invalidated, while a regard to modeſty and decency is ſuppoſed to influence our judgement; and I may be allowed, I hope, to juſtify a repetition and republication of them, upon the ſame grounds that every branch of virtue is daily and repeatedly enforced. By repeated admonitions men may ſometimes, be induced to liſten to the voice of truth; and as every reader has his own way of thinking and feeling, as well as every writer has his peculiar way of ſtating the ſame arguments, ſome may be ſtruck by the repreſentations of one author, who perhaps would overlook the ſame things when treated in a more maſterly manner by another.

What-

Whatever juſtice I may have done it, I am confident I plead the cauſe of virtue, which is more in danger from the preſent practice than many will, perhaps, at firſt ſight allow; and could I ſee the difficulties, juſt mentioned, ſo far removed out of the way as to procure it a fair hearing, I ſhould not doubt of ſucceſs, but would flatter myſelf with the pleaſing hope of ſeeing what is decent and becoming, modeſt and delicate, and the true ornament of the female ſex, once more prevail.

F I N I S.